



## ACTIVE GRIEVING A PROCESS FOR HOPE AND HEALING

By Judy Strong

Successful mourning leads to healing, hope, and a sense of wellbeing. For mourning to succeed, it is necessary to approach it deliberately, because grief isn't just something you feel; grief is a process, an endeavor and it's hard work.

Let's look at some definitions to clarify what we mean. First, there are different definitions of *grief*.

Some say it's an emotional response to the loss of a loved one. It's been called "holding on emotionally to someone who is physically gone". It's also trauma brought on by death and loss, and it causes emotional, mental, and physical shock. It assaults our whole being, including the wounding of the soul.

*Mourning* is the process by which grief is dealt with, restoring health and balance. If one does not acknowledge grief, you can't mourn.

*Bereavement* is the time frame in which the mourning process occurs. There are no set parameters, although there are guidelines.

What is the difference between passive and active grieving? It's exactly as it sounds. Passive is inactivity. It's sitting still, waiting for bad feelings to go away. The aftermath of death and loss is so

debilitating, it's not only a common response, but sometimes a necessary one – to hold still to get your bearings.

Energy levels drop and the pain is too great to bear. Total rest is good for body, mind, and soul, but recovery requires action, an initiative from deep inside that yearns and stretches for wholeness and wellbeing. One can sit quietly in a darkened room and wait for the fog to lift, but that won't result in complete healing. When pain is not expressed, it buries itself deep inside and causes trouble.

Any loss that disrupts your life and tramples on what matters to you will take its toll. This may include a person, a job, a place (home, location, neighborhood), a treasured possession, or a lifestyle.

The love that exists between two people generates hope and a sense of self esteem to each. There is an ongoing regard, one for another, a "wish you well" that says, "You're terrific", "You matter", "I respect and honor you". Within a good relationship, people want what is best, for the relationship and for one another. And, perhaps, whether it is voiced or not, they want the survivor to heal and embrace new life when one of them dies.

When I lost my husband I still had children living at home. We were in turmoil and shock, but I quickly realized I needed to bind up wounds and stabilize the family. Other responsibilities I faced competed with the time and energy I needed to grieve successfully, and to help my children grieve the loss of their father. I not only felt worn out, I was angry.

The mourning process may be compromised while you deal with practical issues. Finances and legal matters take a huge toll on the time and energy of survivors. I was stunned by their demands. Why didn't anyone tell me about this before? Why didn't I know the particulars of our money matters, the legal procedures required, the exhausting work involved in settling an estate? In addition, I had to go to probate court because my husband didn't have a will and we had

minor children living at home. To fully, actively grieve, one needs time, energy, and persistence. A simple plan may look like this:

Time – A significant period of time should be set aside every day to comfort yourself, reflect on your loss, and the deep pain and anguish you feel. Validating the tragedy of your loss allows you to express your feelings, rather than pushing them down, and gives you significant room to explore exactly what has happened, how it affects every aspect of your life, and how you will manage.

Prioritize this period every day. This is key. You may break it into two or more periods, but allow enough time in the segment to do valuable grief work. Remember, it is work – something active. A general routine that's flexible is a good option. And understand, cognitive abilities are compromised during grief and it may be hard to focus and concentrate.

Privacy - Choose a space that's warm and inviting, surround yourself with comforting things, such as music, reading material, tea, a small blanket, and allow no interruptions. Cry, write, read, and think, letting your mind take you where it will. Or just rest.

Activity - Journaling is a positive and beneficial way to grieve. You can write in paragraphs, incomplete sentences, poetry, draw pictures – do whatever is comfortable. There's a study that says healing takes place quicker and more thoroughly when someone journals. It engages the brain, and it also gives you a diary to track your progress.

Music, reading, memorabilia or meditation/relaxation are ideal avenues for getting in touch with your deeper feelings and thoughts.

Energy – Even when you're not consciously thinking about your loss, your subconscious mind and your body are grappling with the blow you have been dealt. Energy levels will be low for some time, and conserving it for the really important things is essential. Decide for yourself what is essential, write them down and review your list often.

Dismiss issues that can't be changed. Note what can't be handled by you alone. You and your family's needs should be at the top of the list. Try to get help caring for minor children, if even for an hour.

If handling the finances is difficult, seek advice from your bank or financial advisor. A short talk can yield surprising shortcuts or methods for better and simpler money management. Daily responsibilities can drain all your energy and motivation. Even if money is scarce, remember to have fun. Don't pass up an opportunity to laugh and relax with friends.

Persistence - This is that quality that keeps us going despite adversity, setbacks, and hardship. In spite of loss, persistence motivates us to strive, to start over, and to tough it out. For persistence to kick in, it takes a deliberate choice. It requires putting yourself on the track to wholeness and life balance and working through your grief.

Put inspiring, motivating messages to yourself on cards and post them around the house.

Buy one good book about overcoming adversity and read a chapter every day.

Rebuilding your life, by accident or design, is the revelation I had when faced with this daunting task. I knew I had to move forward. I had a family to raise, I needed to make a better living, and I wanted to set an example for my children. It dawned on me that a magic plan wasn't going to fall into my lap. I had to figure out what I needed and wanted and how to make it happen. And I knew it started within.

A wonderful, positive gift you can give yourself is to begin to set aside time now, today. Those things we talked about earlier, taking time for you, is essential for life balance and wellbeing.

If you are in grief now, this is essential. If not, then prepare now.

Procrastination prevents us from being prepared for any calamity that befalls us. Design your life-building plan and prioritize its practice. Make it simple enough to manage on your schedule and thorough enough to derive good benefits. You'll start to feel better about life and about yourself.

Confidence, growth, and knowledge increase with practice. You'll begin to see adversity as an opportunity for change, not just a problem to be solved.

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